
POETRY | FALL 2015

Out in the Open

By Deborah Gorlin

No drums or hallucinogens for him, my surgeon,
but as a latter day shaman, in his own white trance, sterile riches,
he's calmed by the smell of alcohol, his tools freshened,

spic and span scalpel and rats tooth saw still warm
from the autoclave. Even before the surgery, tiny victories:
the microbes clinging to his instruments butchered quietly.

Agnes Martin painted white squares in her quest for pure abstraction,
a parochial dream: if it were only just about suturing
shadows and light instead of plunging into soft tissue.

Out of street clothes, donning his gown he tries
for the supernatural look, immaculate as a ghost,
scrubbed down alien impervious to earthbound properties,

to fake out the germs who feast on hunks luxurious
with life, such as hanks of his hair hidden underneath
a blowsy bouffant cap you only see now

in old lady beauty shops. The pleated mask, a purdah,
a dam for the Benares like mouth,
the favored fecal to oral river route.

And those promiscuous hands! Latex gloves each
of his ten fingers, Fred Astaire escort approach,
as if invasive surgery could be courtly, when these days,

it's (we hope) antiseptic robotic arms and cameras
that do most of the procedure anyway. Shod in closed toed
shoes, thick as tanks, eyes anonymous as dashes,

he and his team must speed against this quick season,
autumnal immunities, the papery levees of their precarious masks,
fallen fences soon dangling from their ears.

The slit in my abdomen appears wide as a barn

from the perspective of adventitious pathogens
that gather on the rim, ants whorled to quite the picnic.

But hold off yet with the antibiotics!

Face facts. With our guard down, a gaseous morass ever encroaches,
an adhesive air from which no acetone
can separate us, helplessly sticky, our porous bodies

the breeding grounds for invisible intimacies, break in
and entries. For now the wound is painted a Halloween betadine,
stapled closed, dressed by a punk doily.

I'm sorry but we must not become one.

Deborah Gorlin has published in a wide range of journals including *Poetry*, *Antioch Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *Seneca Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Harvard Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Bomb*, *Connecticut Review*, *Women's Review of Books*, *New England Review*, and *Best Spiritual Writing 2000*. Her second poetry collection, *The Life of the Garment*, won the 2014 May Sarton New Hampshire Poetry Prize, Bauhan Publishing. In 1996, she won the White Pine Poetry Press Prize for her first book of poems, *Bodily Course*. Gorlin holds an MFA from the University of California/Irvine. Since 1991, she has taught writing at Hampshire College, where she serves as co-director of the Writing Program. She is currently a poetry editor at *The Massachusetts Review*.
